
**The Arc of New Jersey
Statement on Respectful Language**

The Arc of New Jersey is committed to using language that is respectful of people with disabilities throughout all our activities, including meetings, conferences, trainings and special events. Although there is not one universal language style preference shared by all people who have a disability, it is important to use respectful and inclusive language when communicating with or about people with disabilities.

Putting the person first, as in “people with disabilities” or “a person with autism,” is called people-first language. It is commonly used to reduce the dehumanization of disability. It is the most widely accepted language when speaking to and about people with disabilities and should be the default unless the person with the disability specifically requests otherwise.

Some people with disabilities may refer to themselves using identity-first language. Identity-first language, as in “the deaf community” or “an autistic person”, may be preferred by some people and is used to celebrate disability pride and identity. It is the personal preference of the person with a disability and should be respected as such.

In any case, there are words and terminology that should never be used, such as “mental retardation” or “retarded” which are offensive. In addition, terms such as “disabled parking” or referring to a child as a “special ed kid” are not acceptable. When speaking about people without disabilities, refrain from using terms such as “normal” or “able-bodied”. These words suggest negative stereotypes of people with disabilities.

Disability is diverse, so remember that it is possible for two people with the same disability or circumstance to feel completely differently about their disability and how they would like to be addressed. What matters most is being respectful of the individual. If there is ever doubt about which language type is preferred, the most respectful thing you can do is ask the person directly. This ensures the individual is choosing and then communicating that choice to you.

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